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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE: ADVANCING THE US POSITION FOR CHANGE
IN CUBA

Classified By: WHA A/S Thomas A. Shannon. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Posts are requested to use the following guidance to demarche host governments in advance of the February 24 selection of Cuba's next president by the Cuban State Supreme Council. Ambassadors or DCMs are requested to deliver these points at the highest available level in Foreign Ministries.

12. (SBU) BACKGROUND: On February 19, Fidel Castro announced his plans not to seek re-election as President of Cuba's State Supreme Council. This decision, taken 19 months after illness forced him to temporarily hand over the reigns of authority to his brother Raul, formalizes what had become increasingly apparent: Fidel Castro's 49 year reign as Cuba's unelected ruler has come to an end. Currently, it is expected that Raul will be chosen as the next President of the State Supreme Council. Whatever the result, Sunday's events represent a transfer of power within the regime structure. In and of itself, it does not signal significant change. However, the new government will inherit many challenges and increasing demands for change from Cuba's citizens. The goal of United States policy is a peaceful process of change that leads to a democratic Cuba. We seek to encourage our friends and allies to act with caution as they evaluate events, most of which will be staged for international consumption, as Sunday's appointment process unfolds. We want to urge partners to see beyond the shuffle of the individuals in leadership positions, and to work toward a process of meaningful political change that leads to a democratic end.

13. (U) The Secretary will issue a press statement on Sunday, February 23, that will reflect the points presented in para 4.

14. (SBU) POINTS:

-- The United States looks forward to a day when the Cuban government reflects the will of the Cuban people as expressed through free and fair elections. We support the Cuban peoples' aspirations for a better life, and their desire to enjoy the fundamental rights and liberties expressed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reflected in the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

-- Our goal is to see a peaceful process of change undertaken that will lead to a democratic Cuba which can be fully integrated into the community of democracies in the Americas.

-- We believe that all democratic governments can support such a process and want to work in parallel with you toward this end.

-- We hope that as your government evaluates events in Cuba and the selection of a new president, it will focus on supporting a process of meaningful and enduring change on the island.

-- At this significant moment in Cuba's history, the message that your government and others have for the government of Cuba is critical. We urge you to highlight the inalienable right of the Cuban people to participate in an open and comprehensive dialogue about their country's future, free of fear and repression, and to choose their leaders in democratic elections.

-- We ask you to focus on the need for Cuba's new leaders to take the essential first step in an enduring process of change -- the release of all political prisoners. This can help to create the space in which a process of national dialogue and reconciliation can begin in earnest.

-- We hope you will reach out to all essential actors in such a process, particularly Cuba's peaceful democratic activists and civil society. It should be our shared goal to help them prepare for and play a constructive role in a process of change.

-- We will know that this change is underway when all political prisoners are free, when Cubans are permitted to exercise their human rights, and when Cuba's appointed leader sets Cuba in motion down a clear pathway to free and fair elections.

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